

# Voting IN AUSTRALIA



**AEC**  
Australian Electoral Commission

# Contents

Your vote, your voice	1
Government in Australia: a brief history	2
The federal Parliament	5
Three levels of government in Australia	8
Federal elections	9
Electorates	10
Getting ready to vote	12
Election day	13
Completing a ballot paper	14
Election results	16
Changing the Australian Constitution	20
Active citizenship	22



# Your vote, your voice

In Australia, citizens have the right and responsibility to choose their representatives in the federal Parliament by voting at elections.



The representatives elected to federal Parliament make decisions that affect many aspects of Australian life including tax, marriage, the environment, trade and immigration.

This publication explains how Australia's electoral system works. It will help you understand Australia's system of government, and the important role you play in it.

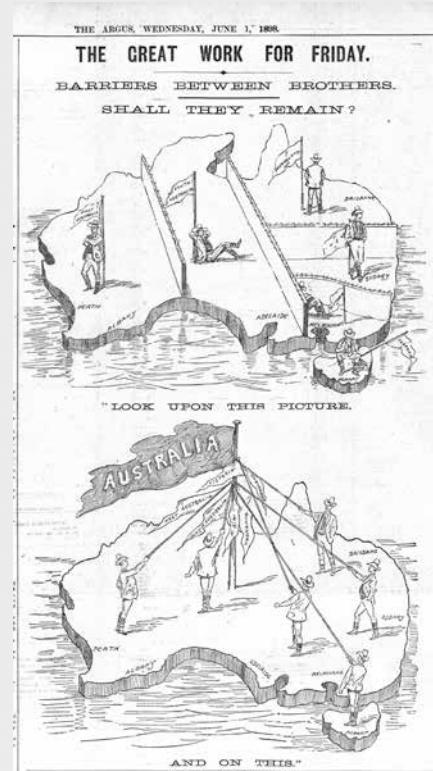
This information is provided by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), an independent statutory authority. The AEC provides Australians with an independent electoral service and educational resources to assist citizens to understand and participate in the electoral process.

# Government in Australia: a brief history

For tens of thousands of years, the heart of governance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was in their culture. While traditional systems of laws, customs, rules and codes of conduct have changed over time, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to share many common cultural values and traditions to organise themselves and connect with each other.

Despite their great diversity, all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities value connection to 'Country'. This includes spirituality, ceremony, art and dance, family connections, kin relationships, mutual responsibility, sharing resources, respecting law and the authority of elders, and, in particular, the role of Traditional Owners in making decisions. The connections to traditional governing measures all have their origins in these same deep cultural values.

When the British arrived in Australia in 1788 they brought their own traditions and culture. They established a prison colony run by a military governor with absolute power, appointed by the British Monarch. The colonists, convicts and Indigenous peoples had no say in how the colony was run.



Above: Federation cartoon, June 1898

		YES		NO			
		44652		19636			
		25016		25016			
ALBANY	914	67	N.E.C'LGARDIE	2723	143	GREENOUGH	
ASH'URTON	32	17	DE GREY	841	15	IRWIN	
BEVERLEY	86	415	DUNDAS	816	30	E.KIMBLEY	
BUNBURY	493	802	FREMANTLE	532	277	W.KIMBLEY	
CANNING	405	509	E.FMANTLE	1322	804	MOORE	
C'LGARDIE	4337	170	N.FMANTLE	1289	678	MURCHISON	
E.C'LGARDIE	11502	732	S.FMANTLE	1544	1382	C.MCHISON	
N.C'LGARDIE	3727	117	GASCOYNE	53	66	N.MCHISON	
			CERALDTON	254	679	S.MCHISON	
				910	209	P'TAGENET	
				359	213	YORK	
							139 670
<b>FEDERAL POLL JULY 31<sup>ST</sup> 1900</b>							
<b>"The West Australian" RECORD BOARD</b>							

### Voting for a nation

Australia became a nation after people from each state voted in referendums about whether or not to join the federation. The last state to vote YES and join the federation was Western Australia.

**Above:** Record board of the Western Australia results for the referendum on Australian Federation 31 July 1900

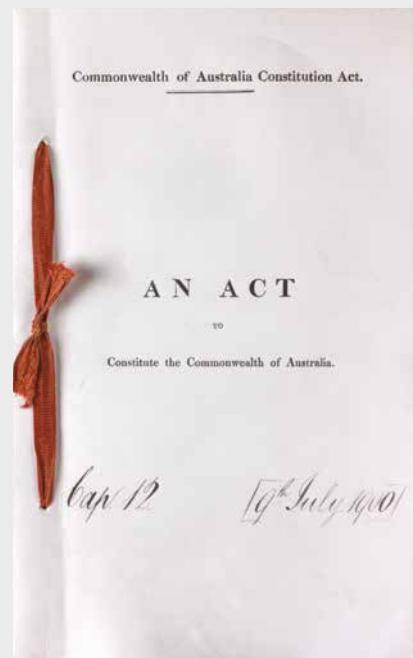
Over the next 50 years more colonies were established and free settlers began to arrive. As their number grew, the free settlers demanded a greater say in how the colonies were governed. By the 1850s Australia was made up of six independent colonies, most with their own parliaments. However, not everyone was able to take part in elections to these parliaments. No women were allowed to vote, and in some colonies only men who owned property over a certain value were allowed to vote. While some Indigenous Australian men were granted voting rights along with other men, most did not know their rights, nor were they encouraged to exercise them.

During the 1880s and 1890s the idea that the colonies should work together and form a national government gained popular support. Leaders from each of the colonies joined together to draft a constitution that would establish a federal (national) system of government. Under the Australian Constitution, states kept their own parliaments and

many of their existing powers, and transferred responsibility for areas that affect the nation as a whole to the federal Parliament. The Australian Constitution outlines the structure and powers of the Australian federal Parliament, and the basis of representation in the House of Representatives and the Senate.

The draft constitution was approved by the people voting in referendums held in each colony between June 1899 and July 1900. Australia became a nation on 1 January 1901 when the six separate colonies formally united to form the Commonwealth of Australia. At federation each colony became a state of Australia.

Australia is a representative democracy. All citizens aged 18 years and over have the right and responsibility to participate in Australia's democracy by enrolling to vote and voting for people to represent them in parliament. Representatives elected to the parliament make laws and decisions on behalf of the nation.



**Above:** Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act, 1900

## Voting rights

Who can vote and have a say in Australian democracy has changed substantially since federation.

In 1901 most male British subjects over 21 and resident in Australia could vote. In 1902 Australia became the second country in the world, after New Zealand, to extend voting rights to women. The *Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902* meant that women gained the right to vote and stand for election to parliament.

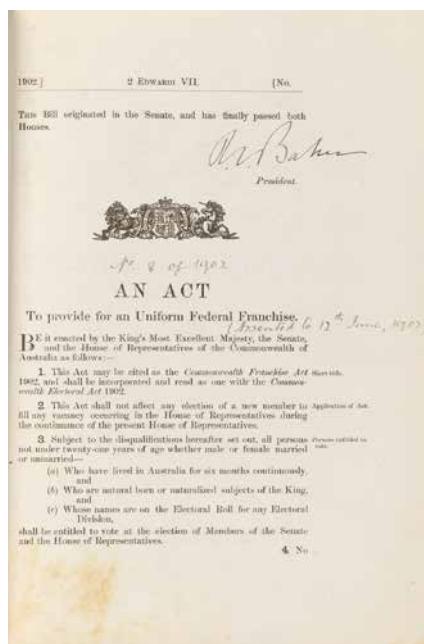
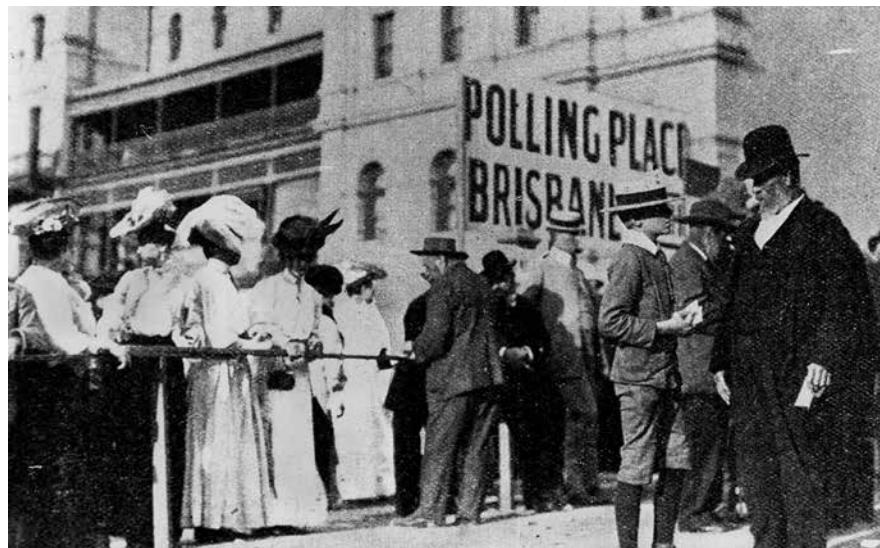
At the same time, however, the *Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902* deliberately excluded any 'aboriginal native' of Australia, Asia, Africa or the islands of the Pacific (except New Zealand) from voting unless they were on a state electoral roll before 1901. Although some Indigenous Australians could vote in federal elections, most were excluded. After campaigning for many years to have the right to be part of the Australian decision making process, all Indigenous Australians gained the right to vote in 1962.

In 1973 more Australians gained the right to participate in elections when the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18 years old.

Who should have the right to vote in Australia's democracy continues to be discussed and can be changed by an Act of Parliament.

### Secret ballot

A secret ballot using a government-supplied ballot paper containing candidates' names was first introduced in Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia in 1856. Often referred to as the 'Australian Ballot', this method of voting has been adopted by many countries around the world. Voting in secret means that voters can't be intimidated, punished or discriminated against for how they vote.



**Top:** Women in Queensland voting in a federal election for the first time, Brisbane, 1907

**Above:** Indigenous Australians voting in 1962

**Left:** Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902

# The Federal Parliament



The Australian people elect all members of federal Parliament. There are two houses of Parliament: the House of Representatives and the Senate.

In Parliament, members form groups or 'parties' with other members with similar ideas, values and policies.

Government is formed by the party or coalition of parties with the support of the majority of members in the House of Representatives. Sometimes after an election, a party or coalition of parties will need the support of minor parties or Independent members to achieve a majority in the House. The leader of the government is the Prime Minister, who, by convention (tradition), is always a member of the House of Representatives.

The largest party or coalition of parties without the support of the majority of members in the House of Representatives forms the opposition. Its leader is the Leader of the Opposition.

Ministers are members of the government with responsibility for particular areas of government activity. They are chosen by the government from both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

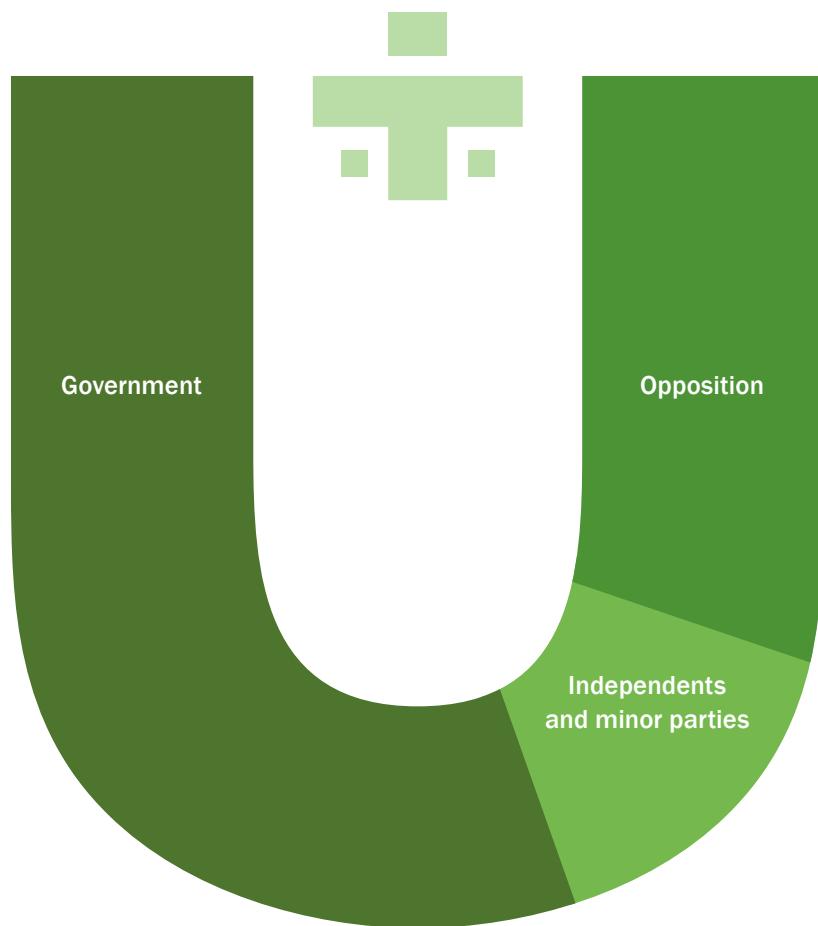


The House of Representatives,  
Parliament House, Canberra



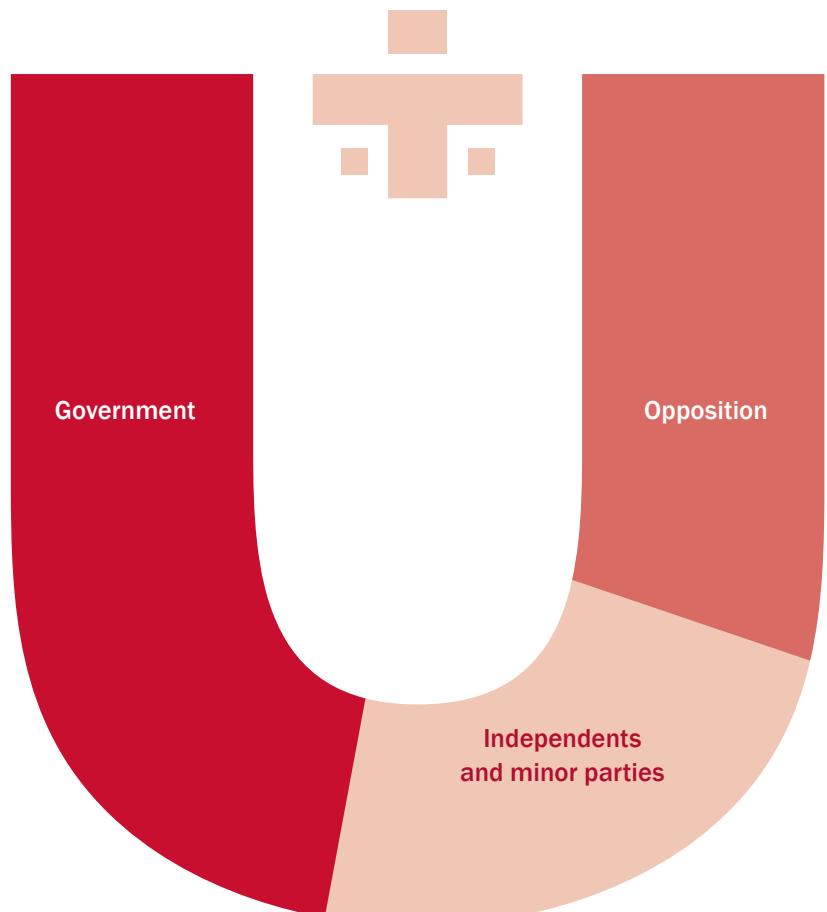
The Senate, Parliament House, Canberra

# House of Representatives



The House of Representatives is also called the 'People's House'. Each member represents the people of their electorate. Australia is divided into 151 electorates based on population. Voters in each electorate choose one person to represent them in the House of Representatives.

# Senate



The Senate is also called the ‘States’ House’. Voters from each state, and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and Northern Territory (NT), elect senators to represent them in the Senate. All states are equally represented in the Senate regardless of their size or population. Each state elects 12 senators, and the ACT and NT elect two senators each. State senators are elected for six-year fixed terms, with half their number elected every three years. State senators commence their term in office on the first day of July after their election. Territory senators are elected for the term of the House of Representatives, which is a maximum of three years.

# Three levels of government in Australia

There are three levels of government in Australia. Representatives at each level of government are elected by voters.

The role of the federal Parliament is set out in the Australian Constitution.

States have their own constitutions and the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory have self-government Acts which outline the powers of their legislative assemblies.

Local governments (also known as local councils) are established by state parliaments to meet the needs of local communities.

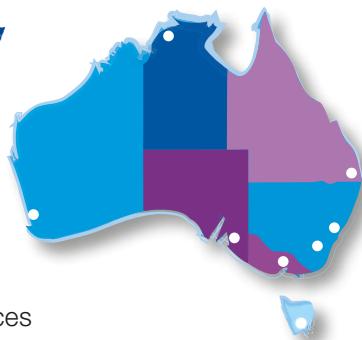
## Federal matters:

- Defence
- Income tax
- Immigration
- Social welfare
- External affairs



## State and territory matters:

- Schools
- Hospitals
- Public transport
- Electricity
- Police and ambulance services



## Local matters:

- Rubbish collection
- Parks
- Libraries and art galleries
- Pet registration
- Local roads



# Federal elections

The Australian Constitution sets out some of the rules governing federal elections, but most are contained in the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* and can be changed by the federal Parliament.

## When are elections held?

A federal election must be held at least once every three years. The Australian Constitution sets the maximum term of the House of Representatives at three years, but the Prime Minister can request an election earlier. Elections are usually held for half of the Senate at the same time as House of Representatives elections, however, they can be held separately.

### Double dissolution elections

If there is a deadlock between the House of Representatives and the Senate over one or more proposed laws (bills), the Prime Minister can request a double dissolution election. This means all the seats in both houses of Parliament are up for election. Double dissolution elections have occurred seven times: in 1914, 1951, 1974, 1975, 1983, 1987 and 2016.

### Senate casual vacancies

If a senator resigns, dies or is disqualified by the High Court of Australia, the former senator's state or territory parliament chooses someone to fill the vacancy for the remainder of the term. The new senator must be from the same party as the previous senator.

### By-elections

If a member of the House of Representatives resigns, dies or is disqualified by the High Court of Australia, their electorate votes to elect a new member. This is called a by-election.

# Electorates

For the House of Representatives your electorate is the area where you live. Electorate size is based on population. A city electorate, where the population is dense, can be as small as several suburbs. A sparsely populated rural electorate can cover a huge area of several hundred square kilometres. Even though electorates are different sizes and shapes, within each state

and territory, they will always have approximately the same number of voters. One member is elected to the House of Representatives to represent each electorate.

For the Senate your electorate is the state or territory where you live. Regardless of its geographical size or population, each state or territory elect a group of senators to represent it.

## Redistributions

Redistributions occur at least once every seven years for each state and territory. They aim to make the number of voters approximately equal in all the electorates in that state or territory. Redistributions take into account expected population changes to ensure the electorates remain equal for at least three-and-a-half years. For example, in high growth areas, the redistributed populations will be set lower to allow for growth.

Communities, geographical features and travel are also considered when deciding electorate boundaries.

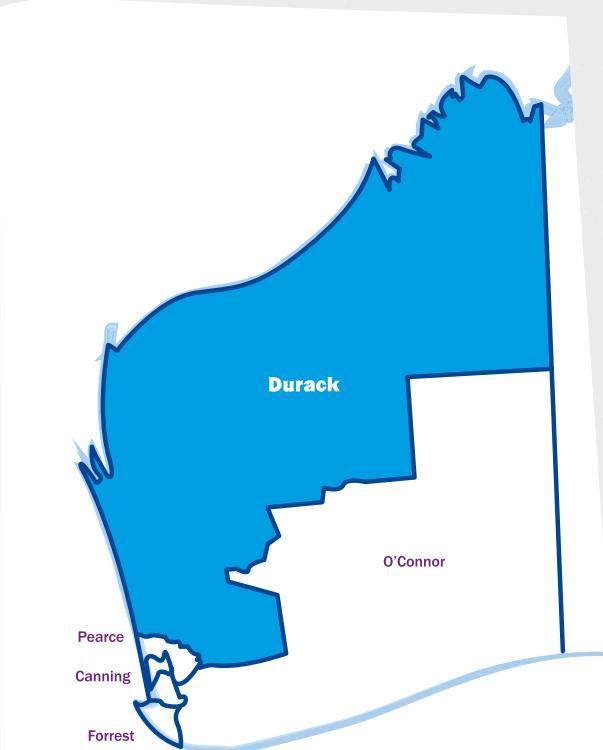
## Nexus

The Australian Constitution states that the number of members of the House of Representatives must be, as near as possible, ‘twice the number of senators’. This is called ‘the nexus’. In 1901 there were 76 members of the House of Representatives and 36 senators. Now there are 151 members in the House of Representatives and 76 senators in the Senate. The number of members and senators can be changed by an Act of Parliament. If the number of senators increases, this could also increase the number of electorates in the House of Representatives.



### Smallest electorate

The smallest electorate in Australia is Grayndler in inner-city Sydney. It covers an area of only 32 square kilometres. Each electorate in Australia has approximately 100 000 voters. In urban electorates like Grayndler people live close together, so these electorates are much smaller than rural and regional electorates.



### Largest electorate

Durack, which includes all of northern Western Australia, is the largest electorate in Australia and the second largest single-member electorate in the world (after Nunavut in Canada). Although it covers 1 629 858 square kilometres – 51 000 times the land area of Grayndler – both electorates have approximately the same number of voters.

## House of Representatives electorate fast facts

Electorate information as at 2016

# Getting ready to vote

Voting is compulsory.  
All Australian citizens  
aged 18 years and  
older must vote.

## How do I enrol?

Before you can vote, you must enrol. You can enrol at any time after you turn 16, but you can only vote in an election when you are 18 or over. You can enrol or update your enrolment online at [www.aec.gov.au](http://www.aec.gov.au) or complete an enrolment form available from any Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) office. Doing this enrolls you to vote in federal, state and local elections.

All Australian citizens over 18 must be enrolled and keep their enrolment up to date with their current residential address. If you are over 18 and have never enrolled, you can enrol now and you will not be penalised. It is never too late.

## Where will I vote?

Find out the name of your federal electorate and nearest polling places by visiting [www.aec.gov.au](http://www.aec.gov.au).

## Who are the candidates?

At each election, many different candidates will seek to be elected as your representative. Before an election, candidates campaign to gain support from voters. It is important to find out about the candidates, their political parties and their views on issues that are important to you. You may read advertising, news stories and social media about the candidates, or even meet a candidate in person. This will help you to decide your voting preferences.

## What if I can't vote on election day?

Voters who are unable to attend a polling place on election day can vote at an early voting centre or apply for a postal vote. This can be done online, at any AEC office or Australia Post outlet.

Voters who have an ongoing issue that may prevent them from getting to a polling place may register as General Postal Voters. Ballot papers will then automatically be sent to them through the post.

Mobile polling teams visit hospitals, nursing homes, prisons and geographically remote places. Even Australian voters who are working in Antarctica are able to vote.

Voters who are overseas or interstate on election day can vote at overseas or interstate voting centres, or by post. If you are overseas you do not have to vote.

## What happens if I don't vote?

After each election, all non-voters will be sent a letter requesting they provide a valid and sufficient reason for failing to vote, or pay a fine.

# Election day



Elections are always held on a Saturday. Public buildings, such as local schools and halls, are used as polling places. Polling places are open between 8am and 6pm on election day.

Polling places are run by polling officials employed and trained by the AEC. They are there to assist, but they cannot tell you who to vote for.

When you enter a polling place, a polling official will direct you to an issuing table. You will be asked three questions before being issued with ballot papers:

- 1. What is your full name?**
- 2. What is your address?**
- 3. Have you voted before in this election?**

The official will then check the certified list of eligible voters in the electorate, mark off your name, and initial each ballot paper in the top right-hand corner. The ballot papers are then handed to you, and you are directed to a voting screen where you vote in secret. After completing the ballot papers, fold and place them in the sealed ballot boxes. There are separate ballot boxes for House of Representatives and Senate ballot papers.

## Compulsory voting

Voting was made compulsory for federal elections in 1924 in response to low voter turnout at previous elections. For example, the lowest turnout for a federal election was in 1903 when only 50.3% of enrolled voters voted. In the 1925 election 91.4% of voters cast a ballot. It is now usual for around 94% of enrolled voters to vote. Australia is one of the few countries in the world with compulsory voting.

# Completing a ballot paper

It is important to read and follow the directions on the ballot paper to make sure your vote is valid and counted.

If you are not sure, ask a polling official for help. You will be asked to number the candidates or groups in the order that you prefer. This is called preferential voting and is used in both the House of Representatives and Senate elections.

## House of Representatives voting

House of Representatives ballot papers are green. One candidate from your electorate will be elected to the House of Representatives.

## Senate voting

Senate ballot papers are white and are divided into two sections by a black line across the ballot paper. Multiple candidates from your state or territory will be elected to the Senate. The ballot paper shows how many Senate positions your state or territory is voting for in this election.

You have a choice in the way you vote for the Senate — above the line or below the line.

## How to complete the House of Representatives ballot paper

The form is a sample ballot paper for the House of Representatives. It features a crest at the top left, the text 'House of Representatives Ballot Paper' in the center, and a circular logo with 'OFFICIAL USE ONLY' at the top right. Below this is a section titled 'State Electoral Division of Division Name'. A bold instruction 'Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice' is followed by eight numbered boxes. Each box contains a small logo icon (a square with diagonal lines) and the name of a candidate with their party affiliation. The boxes are numbered 2 through 8. At the bottom, a note says 'Remember... number every box to make your vote count' and there is a 'SAMPLE' watermark diagonally across the page.

2	SURNAME, Given Names INDEPENDENT
3	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
7	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
4	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
1	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
5	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
6	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
8	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

You must number all the boxes on the House of Representatives ballot paper. Write number 1 in the box next to the candidate who is your first choice of representative, then write number 2 in the box next to your second choice and continue numbering until every box is filled.

Don't worry if you make a mistake. You can ask for another ballot paper and start again.

## You have a choice in the way you vote for the Senate: Either above the line

In the section above the black line, you can vote for the parties or groups you wish to support. Write number 1 in the box above the group or party that is your first choice, then write number 2 in the box above your second choice and continue until you have numbered at least six boxes above the line. If you want to continue, you can number as many additional boxes as you choose above the line.

By voting above the line, your preferences will be distributed in the order the candidates appear below the line for the party or group you have chosen. Your preferences will first be distributed to the candidates in the party or group of your first choice, then to candidates in the party or group of your second choice and so on, until all your preferences have been distributed.

## Or below the line

In the section below the black line, you can vote for individual candidates. Write number 1 in the box next to the candidate who is your first choice of representative, then write number 2 in the box next to your second choice and continue until you have numbered at least 12 boxes below the line. If you want to continue, you can number as many additional boxes as you choose below the line.

# How to complete the Senate ballot paper

**Senate Ballot Paper  
State – Election of 6 Senators**

**You may vote in one of two ways**

**Either**

**Above the line**  
By numbering at least 6 of these boxes in the order of your choice (with number 1 as your first choice).

<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>G</b>
<b>5</b> <b>PARTY</b>	<b>2</b> <b>PARTY</b>	<b>1</b> <b>PARTY</b>		<b>3</b> <b>PARTY</b>	<b>6</b> <b>PARTY</b>	<b>4</b>

**Or**

**Below the line**  
By numbering at least 12 of these boxes in the order of your choice (with number 1 as your first choice).

<b>PARTY</b>	<b>PARTY</b>	<b>PARTY</b>	<b>PARTY</b>	<b>PARTY</b>	<b>PARTY</b>	<b>UNGROUPED</b>
<b>SURNAME Given Names PARTY</b>	<b>SURNAME Given Names</b>					
<b>SURNAME Given Names PARTY</b>	<b>SURNAME Given Names INDEPENDENT</b>					
<b>SURNAME Given Names PARTY</b>	<b>SURNAME Given Names</b>					
<b>SURNAME Given Names PARTY</b>						<b>SURNAME Given Names</b>

**SAMPLE**

**Senate Ballot Paper  
State – Election of 6 Senators**

**You may vote in one of two ways**

**Either**

**Above the line**  
By numbering at least 6 of these boxes in the order of your choice (with number 1 as your first choice).

<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>G</b>
 <b>PARTY</b>	 <b>PARTY</b>	 <b>PARTY</b>	 <b>PARTY</b>	 <b>PARTY</b>	 <b>PARTY</b>	

**Or**

**Below the line**  
By numbering at least 12 of these boxes in the order of your choice (with number 1 as your first choice).

<b>PARTY</b>	<b>PARTY</b>	<b>PARTY</b>	<b>PARTY</b>	<b>PARTY</b>	<b>PARTY</b>	<b>UNGROUPED</b>
<b>SURNAME Given Names PARTY</b>	<b>8 SURNAME Given Names PARTY</b>	<b>6 SURNAME Given Names PARTY</b>	<b>10 SURNAME Given Names PARTY</b>	<b>SURNAME Given Names PARTY</b>	<b>SURNAME Given Names PARTY</b>	<b>SURNAME Given Names</b>
<b>1 SURNAME Given Names PARTY</b>	<b>5 SURNAME Given Names PARTY</b>	<b>3 SURNAME Given Names PARTY</b>	<b>9 SURNAME Given Names PARTY</b>	<b>SURNAME Given Names</b>	<b>11 SURNAME Given Names PARTY</b>	<b>SURNAME Given Names INDEPENDENT</b>
<b>SURNAME Given Names PARTY</b>	<b>SURNAME Given Names PARTY</b>	<b>SURNAME Given Names PARTY</b>	<b>SURNAME Given Names REFORM</b>			
<b>SURNAME Given Names PARTY</b>						<b>SURNAME Given Names</b>

**SAMPLE**

Sample ballot papers

# Election results

## Counting House of Representatives votes

Counting the votes starts at 6pm when polling places close to the public.

Votes cast at polling places are counted at that polling place on election night. The likely result at each polling place for the House of Representatives is usually known within a few hours of counting. The result for the electorate can take several weeks to formally finalise.

One person from each electorate is elected to the House of Representatives.

To be elected, one candidate must gain support from more than half of the voters — an absolute majority.

At each polling place, polling officials sort all ballot papers by first preference votes, which are counted for each candidate. Informal votes are identified and removed from the count.

All the '1' votes are counted for each candidate in an electorate. If a candidate gets more than 50% of these formal first preference votes — an absolute majority — they are immediately elected. Even though they are elected, a full preference count is completed to show how the electorate voted.

### First-past-the-post

Before 1918, representatives to the federal Parliament were elected on a 'simple majority' or 'first-past-the-post' basis. This meant that the candidate who had the most votes after one count was elected — even if they did not have more than half of the votes. This system is still used in many countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, India and Papua New Guinea.

If no candidate has an absolute majority, the candidate with the fewest votes is excluded from the count. The votes for this candidate are then transferred to the candidate numbered '2' on each of their ballot papers, the voters' 'second preference'. This process continues until one candidate has more than half the total formal votes cast and is then declared elected.

### Formal and Informal votes

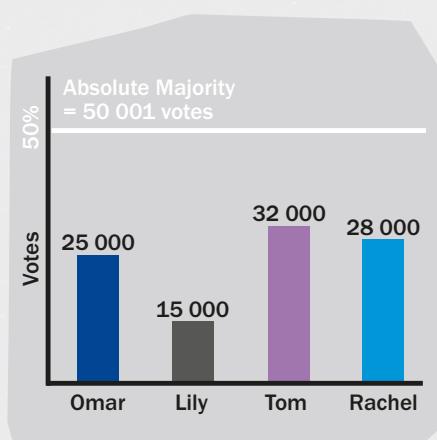
When a ballot paper is marked correctly and completely, it is known as a 'formal vote', and will be counted toward the election result.

When a ballot paper has not been fully completed, is completed incorrectly or you can identify the person who voted, it is known as an 'informal vote', and will not be counted toward the election result. At federal elections, nationally around 5% of votes are informal.

When a ballot paper is numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 etc in the same order that the candidates appear, it is known as a 'donkey vote'. Donkey votes could be a voter not understanding how to vote correctly, or not caring how they vote, or could actually express the voter's true preferences. If all the boxes are numbered, donkey votes are formal and count toward the election result.

## An example of counting House of Representatives votes

Four candidates, Omar, Lily, Tom and Rachel stand for election to the House of Representatives in the electorate of Arcadia. After the election, the ballot papers are counted and there are 100 000 formal votes. The absolute majority needed to win the seat of Arcadia is 50 001 votes — more than 50% of the total number of formal votes.

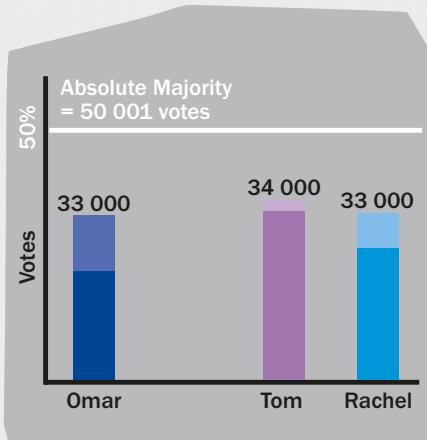


### First count

No candidate has an absolute majority:

- Omar has 25 000 first preferences
- Lily has 15 000 first preferences
- Tom has 32 000 first preferences
- Rachel has 28 000 first preferences.

The person with the lowest number of votes is Lily with 15 000 votes.

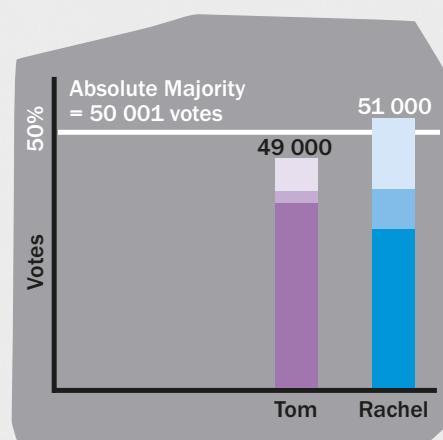


### Second count

Lily is excluded and her votes are distributed to the second preferences marked on these ballot papers:

- Omar gains 8 000 second preferences, taking his total to 33 000 votes
- Tom gains 2 000 second preferences, taking his total to 34 000 votes
- Rachel gains 5 000 second preferences, taking her total to 33 000 votes.

No candidate has an absolute majority.



### Third count

Another candidate must be excluded. Omar and Rachel both have 33 000 votes. In this situation the candidate with the lowest number of votes in the first count is excluded. Omar is excluded and his votes are distributed by the next preference marked on those ballot papers:

- Tom gains 15 000 votes, taking his total to 49 000
- Rachel gains 18 000 votes, taking her total to 51 000.

Rachel has an absolute majority, and becomes the elected representative for the electorate of Arcadia. Rachel was not the candidate who had the most votes in the first count, however she gained an absolute majority on preferences. In this election, voters' first, second and third choices were needed for a final result.

# Election results

## Counting Senate votes

Counting Senate votes starts at 6pm when the polling place closes to the public. However, the likely result is not usually known on the night and can take weeks to finalise.

Each state or territory elects multiple senators. To be elected, a candidate needs to win a quota — a set proportion of the electorate's votes. This is known as proportional representation.

$$\text{Quota} = \frac{\text{Number of formal votes}}{\text{Number of vacancies} + 1}$$

The quota is worked out by dividing the total number of formal ballot papers by one more than the number of vacancies to be filled (ignore any remainder) and then adding 1 to the result.

### An example of counting Senate votes

There are two Senate seats vacant. There are 3 000 formal votes in the 'territory'. The polling officials work out the quota:

$$\text{Quota} = \frac{3\,000}{2 + 1} + 1 = 1\,001$$

**Next the first preference votes are counted for each candidate.**

Kai	200
Kim	1 250
Jade	350
Amir	950
Alexis	250
<b>Total votes</b>	<b>3 000</b>

Kim has 1 250 first preference votes. She has more than the quota and is elected to the Senate.

The 249 votes she received over the quota are called 'surplus votes'. These are transferred to the remaining candidates by distributing all Kim's votes at less than their full value (the transfer value).

The transfer value is worked out by dividing the number of surplus votes by the total number of ballot papers the elected candidate received.

**The second preferences  
from all of Kim's 1 250 votes  
are counted.**

Kai	400
Jade	150
Amir	500
Alexis	200
<b>Total votes</b>	<b>1 250</b>

The second preferences from Kim's ballot papers are multiplied by their transfer value (decimal remainders are disregarded) and then added to the first preference totals for each candidate.

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Number of surplus votes} \\ \hline \text{Total number of Kim's 1st preference votes} = \frac{249}{1\,250} \end{array}$$

**Transfer value = 0.1992**

	No transferred votes x transfer value	Transfer votes	+	1st Preference votes	=	New Total votes
Kai	$400 \times 0.1992$	= 79	+ 200	= 279		
Jade	$150 \times 0.1992$	= 29	+ 350	= 379		
Amir	$500 \times 0.1992$	= 99	+ 950	= 1 049		
Alexis	$200 \times 0.1992$	= 39	+ 250	= 289		

Now Amir also has more than 1 001 votes (a quota) so the two Senate vacancies have been filled.

If all the vacancies have not been filled after all the surplus votes have been transferred, the candidate with the lowest number of votes is excluded. The excluded candidate's ballot papers are distributed at full value to their next preference from the remaining candidates. The distribution of preferences from excluded candidates continues until the required number of senators is elected.

# Changing the Australian Constitution

The Australian Constitution is the legal framework for how Australia is governed. It establishes the structure and defines the powers of the federal Parliament, and the basis of representation in the House of Representatives and the Senate. The Constitution was passed as an Act of the British Parliament — the *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act 1900* (UK) — and took effect on 1 January 1901.

The Constitution can only be changed by Australian voters in a national vote called a referendum. In a referendum, voters mark YES or NO on their ballot paper to show if they agree or disagree with a proposed change to the Constitution. The change will only be made if the majority of voters in a majority of states agree AND if a majority of voters across the nation also agree. This is known as a ‘double majority’. The rules for changing the Constitution are outlined in the Constitution itself. The government is required to action the result of a referendum.



**A referendum is passed when:**



- A national majority (more than half) of voters from all states and territories vote **YES**.

**AND**



- A majority (more than half) of voters in at least four of the six states vote **YES**.

# Referendum fast facts

## Successful changes to the Australian Constitution

The Australian Constitution has remained largely unchanged since federation. Between 1901 and 2016, there were 19 referendums, proposing 44 changes to the Constitution.

### Highest YES vote: 90.77%

In 1967 Australians voted overwhelmingly to amend the constitution to include Indigenous Australians in the Census and allow the federal Parliament to make laws for them.

### Lowest YES vote: 30.79%

In 1988 Australians rejected a proposal to include a statement of rights and freedoms in the Australian Constitution.

### Largest number of proposed changes in a referendum: six

In 1913 the Australian people were asked to decide on six proposed changes to the Constitution. The subjects included giving the federal Parliament increased powers to deal with workplace disputes and to nationalise monopolies. None of the proposals achieved a double majority.

Successful changes to the Australian Constitution

Subject	Date	States that voted YES	Percentage of YES votes
Senate elections	12 December 1906	All	82.65
State debts	13 April 1910	All except NSW	54.95
State debts	17 November 1928	All	74.30
Social services	28 September 1946	All	54.39
Indigenous Australians	27 May 1967	All	90.77
Senate casual vacancies	21 May 1977	All	73.32
Territory voting in referendums	21 May 1977	All	77.72
Retirement of judges	21 May 1977	All	80.10

### National plebiscites and polls

The Australian Government can hold a 'plebiscite' or poll to assess citizens' views on particular issues not related to constitutional change. Unlike referendums, governments are not required to act on the result of a plebiscite. There have been two national plebiscites and one national poll held since federation. In plebiscites in 1916 and 1917 Australians said NO to military conscription, and in a national poll in 1977 Australians indicated their preference for *Advance Australia Fair* as the national anthem.

# Active citizenship

The laws made in the federal Parliament affect Australians every day. Voting in elections is an important way for citizens to have their say, but there are many other ways to participate in Australia's democracy.

## Petition parliament

A petition is a request by a group of citizens for parliament to take action to address a particular issue. It is the oldest and most direct way that citizens can draw attention to an issue and request the parliament's action. The parliament receives many petitions each year on lots of different subjects.

## Parliamentary committees

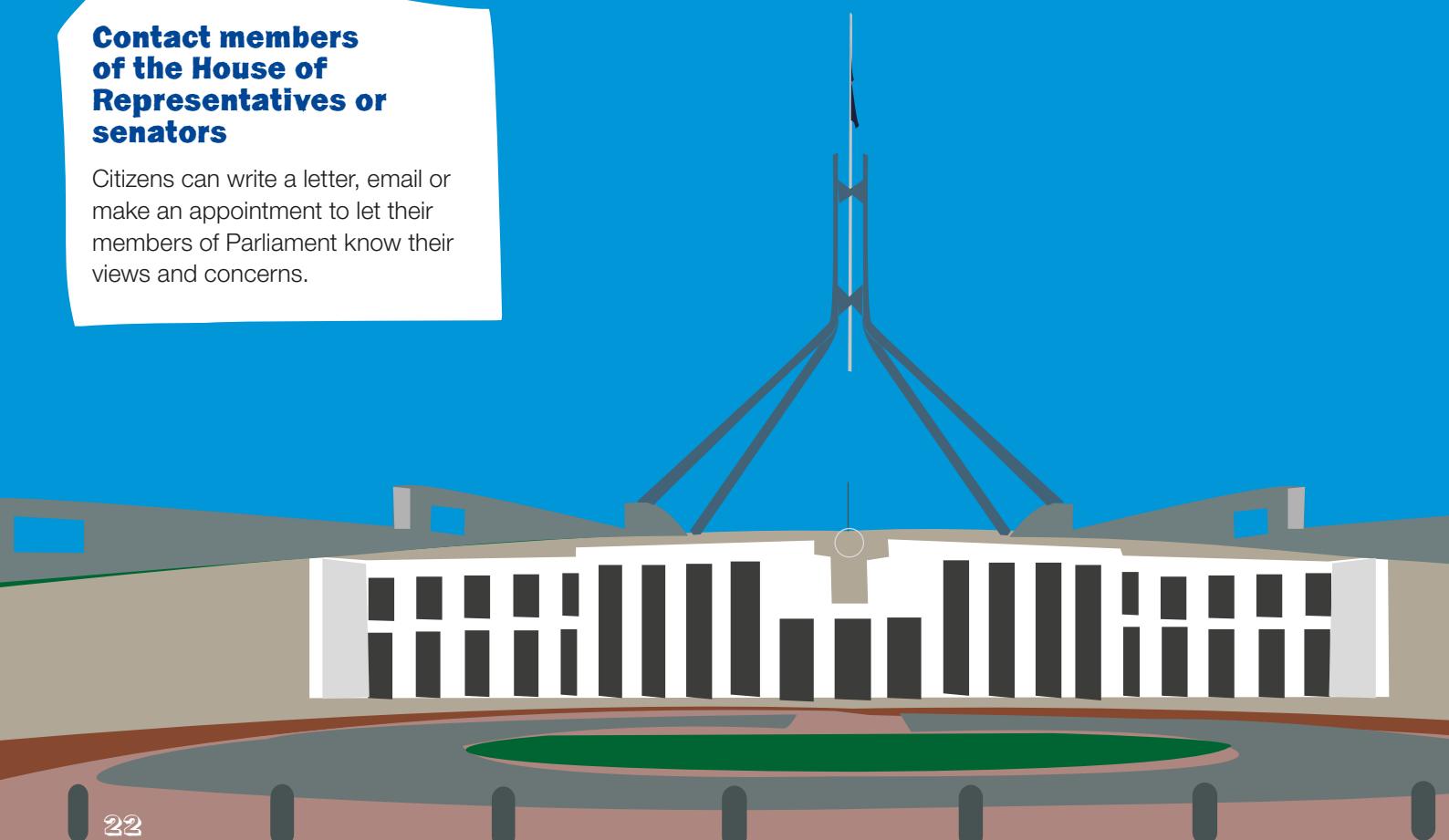
Individuals and organisations can contribute to a parliamentary committee investigating issues they feel strongly about. Public input into committees is important. It is one way parliament can learn about community attitudes and concerns, and work towards addressing issues.

## Political art and activism

Australians can express their opinions in many ways including supporting or forming groups to lobby politicians directly, creating political art or gathering publicly in protests or marches.

## Contact members of the House of Representatives or senators

Citizens can write a letter, email or make an appointment to let their members of Parliament know their views and concerns.



## Image credits

**Page 2:** *The Argus*, 1 June 1898, p5, National Library of Australia, NX11

**Page 3:** Record board of the Western Australia results for the referendum on Australian Federation 31 July 1900, 1900, State Library of Western Australia, 009979 PD

*Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act, 1900*; Original Public Record Copy (1900) Parliament House Art Collection, Art Services Parliament House

**Page 4:** Women in Queensland voting in a federal election for the first time 1907, Brisbane, 1907, State Library of Queensland

*Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902*, National Archives of Australia: A2863, 1902/8

*Indigenous Australians voting in 1962*, 1962, National Archives of Australia: A1200, L42369

**Page 5:** Parliament House, Canberra, DPS AUSPIC

The House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra, DPS AUSPIC

The Senate, Parliament House, Canberra, DPS AUSPIC

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